

The BEACON

August 2011



"A new beginning"

Anniversaries in August

Congratulations

to all of you who have been here for 5 years or more!

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CEO Corner

by Dave Barnard

Unless you have been out of country for the past few years I'm certain you are aware of changes that are occurring in the community based service sector for those individuals with disabilities. This is really nothing new.

Since our inception, 25 years ago, we have contended with the "next change" in community services. When we first began, 8 bed CBRF's were essentially the standard for a community based model for those individuals who could live in the community. It was just over 25 years ago that the State of Wisconsin made a commitment to change the large CBRF format and to take money from the State run institutions and move those dollars into the community to serve individuals in smaller more normalized environments, i.e. 1, 2, 3 and sometimes 4 person homes. That program was known as the Community Integration Program (CIP). It stemmed from Wisconsin's desire to provide opportunities for those who had been locked away in institutions (many from as young as 2 years old) and living there for their entire lives. Many spent 30, 40, 50 and more years locked away behind the institutional walls - out of sight of society. Fortunately our state finally made that commitment to allow all citizens the right to live in the community.

Aurora, and other provider agencies like us, moved those individuals out of the state institutions and into their own homes in their own communities at a daily rate that was a fraction of the cost of the State institutions. By downsizing the 3 state institutions for the developmentally disabled by nearly 6000 individuals it resulted in millions of dollars in savings to the tax payers of Wisconsin who had always funded those programs. The cost savings in reductions of daily rates from the state run institutions to what Aurora and other providers charged were so

immense that it actually helped to create one of Wisconsin's first budget surpluses. Unfortunately, as government has a tendency to do, when those previously budgeted dollars for state run institutions became surpluses (because of the private provider efficiencies) and were no longer needed to fund the institutions, those dollars were funnelled off into other state budget areas such as highways, education, etc.

Over the years those high cost operating budgets of the institutions have faded from memory and now, when budget dollars are extremely tight and the State is looking for any place it can to save money, they are turning to those who have little to no voice or political clout - individuals with disabilities to help balance the budget. It appears from my observations that everyone is looking for a "bad guy" or trying to identify "the problem". Aurora and other providers - previously the heroes who helped move people out of the institutions and into their own homes creating huge savings to the tax paying citizens are now being identified as the one's who drive up costs of care. To be very frank - I am tired of this and the rhetoric is simply a new form of "the big lie". For those not familiar with the big lie concept it is telling a lie over and over enough times until everyone is repeating it and eventually it becomes the truth.

I want to use this forum to set the record straight. It is Aurora and other providers who have been the most efficient and effective means to help individuals live in their own homes. The truth is our budgets have been frozen at existing rates for the past many years with literally no increases - even for cost of living. The real truth is Aurora has received over a 20% cut in our budget

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CEO Corner cont'd

over the past 18 months. Providers like Aurora have no fat, so when we are cut even 1% we need to cut 1% out of our budget. This has resulted in hours of service and supervision being cut from home budgets, staff lay offs, reductions in community integration opportunities and numerous other budget categories that directly affect quality of care for those we serve.

I'm tired of hearing that Aurora needs to cut 20% out of our budget, but still provide the same level and quality of service. It would appear that the public sector (government run agencies) simply has no comprehension of the reality of budgets. In the real world if you need to spend a dollar, you need to have a dollar. Government simply takes more money when it is needed and doesn't really fret over budget deficits. The real truth is that the private sector does not have that luxury. We have literally been told by some that Aurora needs to cut 20% out of our budget, but they don't want to see any reduction in amounts or quality of service. As one of our Administrators put it, "I'd love to go to Walmart, bring my basket to the check out and when the clerk says that will be \$150, I want to say I'll give you \$90 but I want to keep everything in the basket".

I'm also tired of hearing public sector talk of "we need new service models". The truth is that Aurora, and other industry providers, have been providing all of the service models they are referring to as "new" for the past 25 for years. In addition, the real truth is that we have developed newer creative models that the public sector hadn't even considered. This cry for new programs, initiatives and focuses is nothing more than smoke and mirrors that feed into the "big lie".

I'm tired of the public sector disregarding the importance and value of you. You provide services where the "rubber meets the road". You are in the homes, working shifts, providing critical cares to people with disabilities. Just a few years ago, there was a large concern for the low wages paid to community based health care workers. That concern was because even the government realizes the need for these services are going to increase, not decrease. Now, as provider agencies see their budgets sliced apart, the wage issues and resulting impact on recruitment and retention are disregarded. They aren't even mentioned. The truth is you deserve better.

We have been the leading edge service provider for 25 years and we will continue to be so for another 25 years. We have endured many ups and downs in the service delivery system. These "new" changes will work out. It will happen much faster once the public sector realizes that their real answer lies not with their committees and "tools" and forming new departments, but working with and even listening to the people who have been really creating the community based services in Wisconsin for over a quarter century - and that resource is Aurora and others like us.

We will continue to fight the right fight and work hard to

shape community based services into a positive future. We can do this because we know how to do it and because we have great people like you, the owners of Aurora, doing the great job you do every single day.

Thanks for all that you do!

Dave

Life Photo of the Month



"I take pleasure in being useful."

- Harrison Ford, Age 68

Employees of the Month

by Donna Ernst

The employee of the month is chosen for his or her outstanding work performance and awesome attitude in working with consumers, their co-workers and their job. What you may not know is this:

Northwest Region's Employee of the Month – **Carrie Lehrke**. Carrie was chosen due to her consistent hard work and dedication. Dana Veness, PD says: "Carrie was a true "savior" for me during a time that could have easily turned into a crisis. She worked long hours, made sure everything was done and did it all with a positive and uplifting attitude. Carrie has been a great asset to the Aurora team and we are lucky to have such a dedicated, hard working and positive person working with us. Thank you Carrie for all you have done and continue to do, you are truly appreciated."

Central Region's Employee of the Month - **Cindy Farley**. Justin Boiteau, PD has this to say about her. "Cindy is a dedicated staff who is always looking out for the best interest of the consumers she serves. Cindy is a staff who you can ask to do something and you know it's going to get done. Since becoming a PMII Cindy has trained many new staff and also has actively assisted in getting shifts filled. Cindy has been a great addition to the PMII team and a great leader for the operation. Keep up the great work!" Congratulations Cindy!

Eastern Region's Employee of the Month - **Kathy Mozer**. Kathy has been with Aurora for over 5 years and works full time at site 122 in Mosinee. Kathy works with four high medical needs consumers and does an excellent job meeting their medical needs along with ensuring they continue to be an active part of their community. Kathy is also trained at various sites from Wausau to Steven's Point and often assists the Call Center with picking up shifts. Kathy's positive attitude and constant willingness to help out makes her a very valuable Aurora owner. Thanks for all you do Kathy!

Congratulations to all of you!



Safety Spotlight of the Month

Operation 103 Shell Lake is the Northwest Region's winner. 103 is home to three individuals with varying disabilities from brain injury to mental health issues. Two of the individuals use wheel chairs and are assisted by staff with pivot transfers. At this home there is also use of diabetic supplies on a daily basis, which include blood tests as well as the administration of insulin. The team reviews safety issues with in the home at each team meeting and very good at brainstorming ways of making the home safe. With good communication and hard work this house deserves this months safety spotlight.

Operation 59 is the Eastern Safety Spotlight Winner! Recently with the admission of a new housemate keeping safety in mind on a daily basis became exciting and at times a challenge. This new gentlemen has a walker and oxygen. The first and foremost point this team discovered is good communication which created effective safety awareness both in the home and in the community. Recently on a fishing outing communication again was the base for a successful and safe experience. Communicating and educating each other on fishing, tackle, weather, the water etc. was not only a fantastic way to teach, but also a creative way to get participation by all. *Safety was hooked line and sinker!!!*

Operation 094 in Arcadia is the Central Region's winner for the month. Site 094 has not had a first report of injury in over a year. The staff at this home is constantly aware of safety issues that arise and never fails to correct them immediately. Through good communication and team work, they are able to avoid injuries. Congratulations to 094 on the great safety record. Keep up the good work!

A Day in the Life *by* Scott Jacobs

Andy Wolf, Director of Aurora Community Counseling, has been connected (on and off) with Aurora for much of its 25 year history. In 1986, as an undergrad student in Voc Rehab at UW-Stout he worked at the original 8th Street group home. He later worked as a live-in at an early apartment operation.

Andy had actually started college in Stout's Hotel and Restaurant Management program but was seeking something with more personal meaning and then found the Voc Rehab program.

When Andy moved back to his home area near Milwaukee in 1988 he remained involved in services to persons with disabilities by working for five years at a sheltered workshop in Oconomowoc. He was also pursuing his master's degree in social work at UW-Milwaukee, where he graduated in 1992. He received his clinical training which led to mental health work in Brookfield.

Andy would make annual trips back (for hunting in the beautiful north woods), and each trip through Menomonie included a knock on Dave and Jim's door to say hello, and ask about employment opportunities. Andy quipped, "I think they were sick of me bugging them every year" and ultimately he was offered a job in the early Support Services department. He officially began (again) with Aurora in 1996.

Before long, we were licensed to do outpatient mental health and Andy was using his training (and long connection with residential work) to bring healing and health to our clients. Following the tornado project in Ladysmith in 2002-2003 Andy assumed the Director role with ACCESS (now called Aurora Community Counseling) and since then has been juggling many hats as therapist, administrator, and supervisor.

He witnessed, and helped guide, a real explosion of growth with ACC, adding more therapy offices, therapists, support staff, contracts with insurance networks and EAP's (not without the rock-solid support of office staff), and the contract with the Madison Vet Center in 2008.

Andy also knows the importance of balance in work and life. For him this includes: exercise, spending time with his wife



Candy and their children Abby and Izzy, being outdoors and "leaving work at work." Andy also has an abiding faith in the people he serves (clients and professionals) and that they know what they need in life, and that our job is simply to serve as guides as they achieve their goals.

Sounds a lot like what has guided Aurora for its 25 years!

Consumer Spotlight



I would like to introduce to you, Duncan Romero who is being featured in this article for two reasons: he's an amazing individual with a passion and talent for wood working and because he's won a fabulous trip to Walt Disney World, California!

Duncan has been a part of the EC Voc Center for over seven years and he says he loves the new space! That's probably because of the wonderful woodworking room where Duncan and staff, Gil, can do all of their amazing wood creations. Gil states that "Duncan is his best assistant". When asked what his favorite wood working project is to do, Duncan said, "I like designing and building birdhouses". He goes on to explain that he and Gil can make anything and "it all starts with a picture and it's very important to read instructions even though you may think you know what you're doing". A project they most recently created was a birdhouse model replica of a Grist Mill which took four months to create. One of Duncan's goals is to teach a class on how to use a wood-burner and is trying to reach that point as soon as he works through his fears of using power saw and working with some chemicals because Duncan "doesn't want to end up going to the hospital just for a birdhouse"!

As for his passion for woodworking, Duncan explains that he can build, remodel, repurpose and repair anything you give him just as long as you don't order anything that can't fit through a door or is bigger than the building. Duncan feels that anyone can start building something just by picking up a hammer and nails. Well that's some inspiration! I know I've been inspired to go to my pile of miscellaneous wood pieces and start creating a masterpiece just like Duncan. And after seeing pictures of projects that's he's created I would have to agree with Pat McCombs, EC Voc Center Director, who explains that "Duncan is a great man to have around".

By Sadie Bygd

Duncan spent some time excitedly talking about his most recent win which was a trip to Disneyland and California Adventure Park through Trips Inc. Special Adventures who graciously donated one free trip. Trips Inc. is an organization that has been planning and facilitating vacations for people with disabilities for the past 20 years. Because of a chance meeting with the founder of Trips, Inc at a conference, one person from Aurora would win and that person was Duncan! Up until this recent winning, Duncan had been saving money to afford a trip out to the west coast and realized he would have to save for another year. That is until he recently found out he won the Walt Disney trip! Duncan has never been on an airplane and says "it made me proud that my name got pulled out of a drawing and won!"

If you have a chance to visit the EC Voc Center, check out Duncan's creations and you will be amazed! Congratulations, Duncan and keep up the great work you do!

(For more information on Trips Inc. go to their website at: www.TripsInc.com.)



Aurora Picnic Visitor

Representative Kathy Bernier, 68th Assembly District, stopped in for a visit at the Aurora picnic in Chippewa Falls. Representative Bernier lives in Chippewa Falls and is very familiar with work done to support people with disabilities to live in the community. Aurora owners Dave Barnard and Jim Neuman, as well as Executive Director Holly Hakes, spent time talking to Representative Bernier about the importance of adequate funding for community based services. All of our area legislators were invited to both Aurora picnics. We were very thankful to Representative Bernier for taking the time to attend.

Realize and Embrace Authentic Living

Let the Sun shine in.

I always smile when I catch a glimpse of my dog basking in the sun. "Scruffy", our "Toto" look alike, will stretch out on her side, extend her limbs as far as possible, and lay there snoozing. When I see Scruffy sunbathing, I think to myself "that is something I can relate to". Scruffy and I have something in common - I too enjoy that feeling of warmth on my skin, that feels like it penetrates to the bone. The power of sunshine has a way of bringing you right to a state of calm. It can create a sense of sleepiness, laziness, dreaminess and just simple relaxation. The sun shines on everyone, everywhere.

Maybe, you should let it shine more often on the **REAL** you.

Take a cue from the sun and relax. Go ahead, be lazy! Move more slowly, stretch more completely and yawn more deeply. Enjoy the most intense month of sunshine while it lasts. And when summer is over, embrace a rested and ready to face the world **REAL** you.

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How can I manage stress better?

by Cindy Wolbert

Identifying unrelieved stress and being aware of its effect on our lives is not sufficient for reducing its harmful effects. Just as there are many sources of stress, there are many possibilities for its management. However, all require work toward change: changing the source of stress and /or changing your reaction to it. How do you proceed?

1. Become aware of your stressors and your emotional and physical reactions.

Notice your distress. Don't ignore it. Don't gloss over problems. Determine what events distress you. How does your body respond to the distress? Do you become nervous or physically upset? If so, in what specific ways?

2. Recognize what you can change.

Can you change the stressor by avoiding or eliminating it? Can you reduce their intensity (manage them over a period of time instead of on a daily or weekly basis)?

Can you shorten your exposure to stress (take a break or leave the physical premises)? Can you devote the time and energy necessary to making a change (goal setting or time management techniques)?

3. Reduce the intensity or your emotional reactions to stress.

The stress reaction is triggered by your perception of danger...physical danger and/or emotional danger.

Are you viewing your stressors in exaggerated terms and/or taking a difficult situation and making it a disaster? Are you expecting to please everyone?

Work at adopting more moderate views; try to see stress as something you can cope with rather than something that overpowers you. Put the situation into perspective.

Don't focus on the negative aspects and the "what if's." Slow, deep breathing will bring your heart rate and respiration back to normal. Relaxation techniques can reduce muscle tension.

4. Build your physical reserves.

Exercise for cardiovascular fitness three to four times a week. Eat well-balanced, nutritional meals. Avoid nicotine, excessive caffeine, and other stimulants. Mix leisure with work. Take breaks and get away when you can. Get enough sleep. Be as consistent with your sleep schedule as possible.

5. Maintain your emotional reserves.

Develop some mutually supportive friendships/relationships. Pursue realistic goals which are meaningful to you, rather than goals others have for you. Expect some frustrations, failures, and sorrows. Always be kind and gentle to yourself.

Adapted from www.ivf.com/stress.

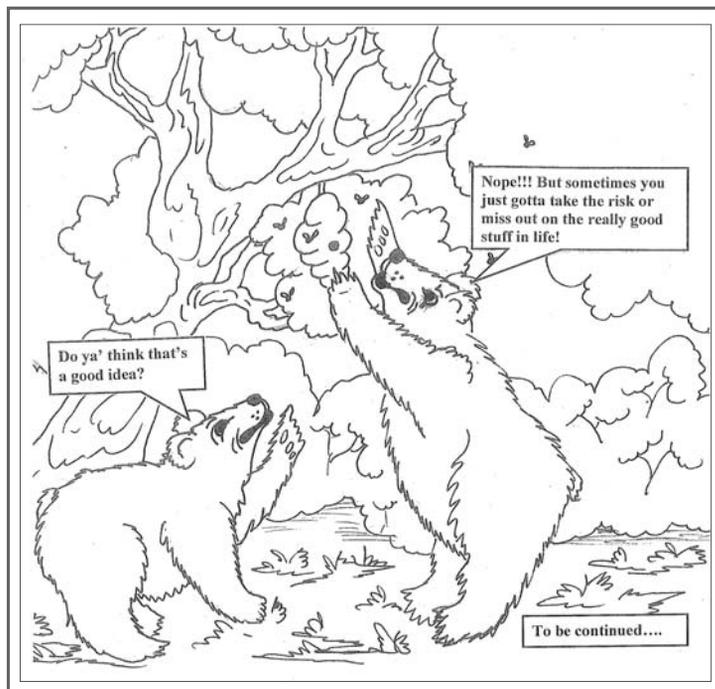
Plover...growing! by Cheri Butkiewicz

Aurora Vocational Services within the Plover area is growing and changing while continuing the consistency and quality for which we strive.

The Plover Day Center has a seasoned staff for which some that have been with Aurora since 1996. They are empathic, devoted and a hard working group of individuals that are all different yet complement each other, having unique qualities that benefit the consumers. They are very competent in their positions as program assistants and have made some great strides in becoming a cohesive group that work together for the good of the consumers. Some of the Center staff have also had the opportunity to become cross trained and work as job coaches with office assistant consumers.

We are excited about the new consumers we have gained since the first of the year. Earlier in the year we had three new admissions from Aurora Residential homes. Recently we have added two additional consumers, and there is the prospect of another five or six consumer, who may join us within the next few months. We are enjoying the change and diversity this adds to the Center and look forward to continued growth.

Since the first of the year, the vocational department has done a lot of adapting. We have lost a few staff members, and have efficiently integrated new staff members into our ever changing team. Sara Bembenek, Vocational Director, has established a crew that has developed and grown with the changes. They have a team that works primarily in Wood County and then one specifically assigned to Portage county. This has allowed more consistency with the consumers and allowed for more clearly assigned roles for coordinators.



by Kathi Tollefson

If you have any questions or comments about the Beacon, please send them to: Beacon@AuroraServices.com or mail to: Stavroula at Aurora Community Services, P.O. Box 68, Menomonie, WI 54751.